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SUBJECT: MOSCOW MAYOR IN SEVASTOPOL: MFA DISTANCES ITSELF  
FROM LUZHKOV'S RANT

Classified By: Pol/Min Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1,4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov's February 21 rant in Sevastopol about Russian interests in Crimea merited modest coverage on the major evening television news programs, but did not have much resonance in GOR official circles. The GOR continues to emphasize the "new maturity" in Russian-Ukrainian relations, issuing a February 14 statement on the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations that emphasized the sovereign equality of Russia and Ukraine. The MFA noted that "considerable difficulties" had been overcome and a constructive dialogue had been established. In a similar vein, on February 19, the MFA posted a lengthy interview with the GOR's Special Envoy on the Black Sea Fleet (BSF), Dorokhin, which also stressed the new and stable footing of GOR-Ukrainian relations and highlighted the work of a bilateral commission that is examining all issues related to Sevastopol.

¶2. (C) On February 28, Victor Sorokin, Director, MFA Second CIS Department (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) dismissed Luzhkov's remarks as emotional and characteristic of a politician who always has the public in mind when he speaks. Sorokin underlined to us that the bilateral relationship is developing along a well-worked out path and that Russia stands by the principle that Crimea belongs to Ukraine. According to Sorokin, what Luzhkov said should not throw any doubt on the bilateral relationship. Sorokin said that the February 27 BSF Subcommittee talks co-chaired by DFM Karasin and acting Ukrainian FM Ohryzko went well, as expected.

¶3. (C) Myraslava Shcherbartyuk, Counselor at the Ukrainian Embassy, characterized Luzhkov's remarks to us as "irresponsible" and not in line with the agreed framework of the bilateral relationship. She indicated that the full effect of his speeches would play out longer in Kyiv than in Moscow.

¶4. (C) Comment. Luzhkov, serving in his last year after fifteen years in office, enjoys free rein in Moscow. His unapologetic nationalistic speeches have become a staple feature of the capital's political life. While his views no doubt reflect the feelings of a segment of the Russian public, they are not consistent with Moscow's official line that after a period of disruption, ties with Ukraine are back on track and Crimea's status is not on the agenda.

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